

# TWEETS, AND TROLLS AND BEING TARGETED

Life in the public spotlight can attract more than just fame and fortune. One of the UK's leading personal security experts opens up on how to deal with online abuse while protecting yourself, your career, and your reputation.

There I sat across from one of England's highest-profile individuals, watching them sob while they shared how overwhelmed they were with fear.

Publicly, they held it all together. Strong. Confident. Composed. But behind closed doors, their life was being turned upside down by someone, or rather something, that's become more and more common in the lives of today's celebrity:

## Online abuse.

As an advisor on national and personal security issues, I've watched fearless leaders, politicians, and athletes crumble under the pressure that came from someone they've never met or seen. Threats, criticism, and backlash they received anonymously was enough to have a massive impact on their mental health... not to mention their performance.

What started out as a questionable message or email turned into a crisis that consumed them — sometimes even their careers.

Whether it's a stalker, a troll, or someone digging through your old Tweets for dirt, this "underbelly of the internet" can pose a threat that goes well beyond just a few hurtful comments. Some are out to do far more harm — even going as far as sabotaging your reputation, your career, your family, and sometimes your life.

In the wonderful yet cruel world of social media, your life essentially becomes an open book to whoever chooses to read it. Fans and followers expect you to share a behind-the-scenes look at who you are both on and off the field. Some sponsors or PR agencies even expect it. But with that comes both the blessing and the curse of inviting complete strangers into your life.

So if you want to use social media to grow your brand on and off the field,

engage with fans, and leverage sponsorships, here are three easy ways to make sure you avoid becoming a victim of online abuse and stay out of the headlines... in a good way.

## Don't Feed the Trolls!

You know who they are — the basement dwellers and keyboard warriors that get their kicks from antagonising you through your comments on Instagram or tagging you on Twitter.

But while someone with 13 followers who chooses to comment about your girlfriend or your performance on the pitch may not be much of a threat, reacting or responding can sometimes get you into more trouble.

Crafting a clever response might feel like it gives you the upper hand. But when you strike back, you're only fuelling the fire by giving them recognition or air time. In the end, the trolls win by goading you into responding.

Plus, most people don't know that every time you reply to these trolls or critics, you open your network to that person, essentially giving them a new level of access to you and your friends and family they didn't have before — a big price to pay for an annoying comment.

But let's say a comment escalates to an abusive threat or personal attack. How can you tell the difference between someone you should take seriously and someone that just needs to be blocked?

There's usually a fine line between those who make a threat and those who actually pose a threat. That's why Defuse Global's team of specialists are trained and experienced in not just identifying the individual who's made a threat but assessing what kind of danger they pose. At the end of the day, your safety and peace of mind is a major priority.

So, if you ever run into a situation where

you feel unsafe or even uncomfortable, we recommend you get in touch before it escalates and becomes a more serious issue. When a threat isn't managed or investigated properly, the evidence of abuse may be lost forever.

## Clean Up Your Digital History

After advising numerous high-profile politicians and athletes on how to feel safer on and offline, I'm still shocked at how little they know about what's out there on them.

Whether it's an old account they forgot about or some old photos from before they were thrown into the public eye, they're typically amazed at how easy it is for me to dig up an old story or photo that could come back to haunt them.

These days it's hard to go a month or two without another story about some high profile individual or their partner coming under fire for a Tweet or incriminating photo they'd long forgotten about.

What many don't realise is how preventable a lot of these situations are. Knowing what's out there about you before it's leaked gives you the chance to get ahead of the game before someone else spins the story, even if you need to have press lines ready if something gets out.

PR companies and lawyers can help you craft a response after something is leaked, but that's more of a reactionary approach to try and reverse a lot of damage that's already been done.

My team and I prefer to take a more proactive approach to building and protecting your public image. One of the first steps we take a lot of our clients through is a Digital Vulnerability Assessment. Not only do our specialists help uncover any hidden gateways into your personal accounts, but we also find and get rid of anything online that could harm your reputation (anything we do or find is 100% confidential).

Cleaning up your digital history can start with a simple review of your social media accounts. Is there anything that could be misconstrued? Taken out of context? Are there any posts that include personal information that could end up in the wrong hands? It doesn't take much but identifying any potential issues could prevent a PR disaster later down the road.

## Watch What You Share Online

We all love to share pictures while we're on holiday. But it's in your best interest to think twice before you post those beach pics from Dubai to Instagram.

Sharing photos from your remote location may as well be paired with a caption that says, "We're not home at the moment. Feel free to find out where we live, let yourself in, and help yourself to my wife's jewellery collection."

It wasn't too long ago when a well known England footballer's holiday post turned into a high profile burglary, generating unwanted news headlines.

But holiday pictures aren't the only mistake that I see celebrities and athletes

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making. Sharing pictures of your brand new car, your wife's jewellery, or the new addition to your watch collection is an easy way to make yourself — or your stuff — a prime target. And the more you share, the more reasons you give someone to try and claim your hard-earned belongings as their own.

Even if your social media accounts are locked down and set to private still doesn't mean you're safe and in the clear. What we often find through our client's Digital Vulnerability Assessments is how easy it is to get access to you by hacking into your devices or a friend or a family member's account that's less secure.

Am I saying you should never post photos from that private beach or ski resort? Not necessarily. But choosing not to reveal anything about where you live or check-in somewhere in real-time are simple ways to keep yourself and your family safe.

One of the most common recommendations I make to all of our clients is to use a VPN, or Virtual Private Network. VPN's can be used for a number of reasons, but they're most helpful in keeping your IP address and geographic location

anonymous. Having a VPN makes it much harder for the average hacker, journalist or troll to access not only your own personal devices, but pinpoint wherever you are in the world.

For something that costs less than £100/year, it's a simple tool that can be used to protect yourself as well as your family around the clock.

## The Bigger Picture

Every athlete knows that fame and fortune opens the door to more distractions.

That's why my goal isn't to scare you or even advise you on the right and wrong way to use social media. It's to offer a few helpful tips that might give you one less thing to stress or worry about, both on and off the field.

My whole focus — no matter the individual — is to help you protect your career, your brand, and the life you've built for yourself and your family. Those things are way too valuable to put at risk because you didn't take online abuse seriously or know how to handle suspicious behaviour.

## ABOUT PHILIP GRINDELL

As one of the UK's most highly sought after subject matter experts on personal and national security issues, Philip Grindell was called in after the murder of Jo Cox MP to keep other politicians safe. From politicians to high-profile athletes, he fully understands the life of those who live in the public spotlight and can handle the challenges they face quickly, discreetly, and professionally.

Together with his team of world-class specialists, Defuse Global is able to quickly defuse real threats and spot potential vulnerabilities, giving their clients and their families the safety and peace of mind, they're looking for at home, online, and out in public life. Skills and expertise that were once used against organized crime and terrorist organizations are now offered to help you.

For more information or to schedule a free personal consultation, visit:

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